



Pasture-Raised Lamb Production Protocols

1. **Locally-Raised**
 - 1.1 All sheep should be born, raised and finished in North Carolina or the surrounding region, which includes bordering counties in the four contiguous states of VA, TN, GA and SC and/or areas within a reasonable distance (150 miles or less) of participating processors.
 - 1.2 When it is necessary to bring in sheep from elsewhere, animal identification procedures must be implemented and records provided to verify the origin and lifetime management of the animals and to ensure compliance with Firsthand Foods' standards.

2. **Farm Ownership**
 - 2.1 Firsthand Foods sources only from working, independent farms.
 - 2.2 Working, independent farms are defined as individuals or families or partners who own their own animals, are engaged in the day-to-day management of the farm and its animals, and derive a significant share of their livelihood from the sale of livestock. This includes cooperatives or marketing groups as long as participating members are working independent farms.
 - 2.3 Exceptions to the working, independent farm requirement may be permitted for farms that serve an educational purpose and comply with all production protocols.

3. **Animal Identification & Traceability**
 - 3.1 Individual animal identification will be maintained on every animal from birth through processing.
 - 3.2 Each animal must be identified with an ear tag at birth. If not tagged at birth, sheep should be tagged at the first handling and no later than weaning.
 - 3.3 Each farmer must maintain data on each animal using an "Individual Animal Record." Required data include veterinary treatments, a birthdate (or birth date window for a group of animals), birthplace, sex, and breed(s).
 - 3.4 Individual animal identification will be maintained on every animal as soon after birth as is possible, and throughout the production cycle. In the case an animal loses its individual identification tag, it should be replaced immediately to prevent the loss of identity.

- 3.5 Prior to slaughter, producers must fax, or email a Firsthand Foods Traceability form, which confirms the individual animal ID #s and (if provided) the ID #s used at the processor, the birth date, sex, breed(s), and live weight of each animal.

4. **Animal Welfare Approved**

- 4.1 Firsthand Foods sources sheep only from farms that are certified by Animal Welfare Approved (AWA). See <https://animalwelfareapproved.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AWA-Sheep-Standards-2017-v3.pdf>.
- 4.2 Animals must be harvested at an AWA approved facility designated by Firsthand Foods.

5. **Pasture Management**

- 5.1 Animals must be housed on annual or perennial pasture for their entire lives. Any confinement to non-pasture areas must be limited to a one-week weaning period, and for incidental holding.
- 5.2 Pastures must be maintained with at least 75% forage plant cover.
- 5.3 Producers must have a productive and consistent forage program in place to prevent over-grazing and support their sheep flock and subsequent lamb development. High quality forage is necessary to support the lamb carcass size required by Firsthand Foods.
- 5.4 Multi-species rotational grazing is encouraged to improve pasture development, soil fertility, weed management and pest control.
- 5.5 Grazing sheep on solar farms is encouraged, provided that high quality forage is consistently available.

6. **Animal Age**

- 6.1 Each lamb sold to Firsthand Foods must be less than 12 months of age at the time of slaughter. If the animal is deemed to be older than 12 months by the processor's inspector, the producer is liable for associated losses. Producers may sell sheep to Firsthand Foods that are older than 12 months of age as mutton.

7. **Carcass Size**

- 7.1 The minimum live weight target for market lambs is 120 pounds. This size has been determined to yield meat cuts desired by Firsthand Foods' customers, to reduce per pound processing costs, and to provide higher returns to producers.

8. **Breeds**

- 8.1 Producers must raise Katahdin sheep. This breed provides the needed balance of growth, heat tolerance, parasite tolerance, maternal ability and carcass quality. Other genetics may be evaluated for carcass traits and meat quality on a case-by-case basis and if approved by Firsthand Foods may be considered for inclusion.

9.0 Growth & Disease Management

- 9.1 Veterinary treatments, such as vaccinations and worming, must be recorded on group or individual animal record(s) and must be available for review at any time.
- 9.2 Sheep CANNOT be administered hormone implants or be fed sub-therapeutic, growth-promoting antibiotics.
- 9.3 Producers are encouraged to keep animals healthy by using internal and external parasite control, a vaccination program, and to use a sound preventative health program including adequate vitamin and mineral supplementation.
- 9.4 Producers will use only FDA approved products and will keep records of all animal treatments (including internal and external parasite control, vaccinations, and other necessary treatments).
- 9.5 If an animal should become sick, we encourage producers to treat it, including with antibiotics if deemed necessary, and to follow all applicable and required withdrawal periods, including those required by Animal Welfare Approved. All treatments must be recorded.

10. Feeding & Nutrition

***Background:** Sheep are ruminant animals that eat grasses and forages almost exclusively. The reproductive capacity of sheep is highly dependent on consistent and adequate nutrition. When pasture quality declines such as during severe drought or weather extremes, female sheep have difficulty breeding. Thus, lamb is often only available in the marketplace seasonally. Firsthand Foods sheep production protocols address the need to ensure year-round lamb production.*

- 10.1 To achieve proper nutrition and reproduction, ewes may be provided with access to high-fiber supplements.
- 10.2 Supplements may not be fed in confinement but must be fed on well-managed pastures.
- 10.3 Approved supplements include soy hulls (the skin of a soybean) and corn gluten (the non-starchy components in a corn kernel).

11. Delivery of Finished Animals

- 11.1 Producers must deliver sheep and mutton in good condition to an Animal Welfare Approved processor approved by Firsthand Foods..

12. Payment

- 12.1 Payment rates are determined prior to the animal leaving the farm. Payment is based upon the animal's hanging weight as determined at the processor.
- 12.2 Producers should verify the hanging weight of each animal and invoice Firsthand Foods (hanging weight x payment rate).
- 14.3 Payment rates vary and are determined and set annually.
- 14.4 Producers are required to sign a credit agreement per the Packer & Stockyard Act.

13. Communication, Engagement & Ongoing Education

- 16.1 All producers are required to communicate regularly with Firsthand Foods and are encouraged to utilize email unless other arrangements are made. Firsthand Foods will visit each farm a minimum of once per year.
- 16.2 Producers are required to attend at least one Firsthand Foods' producer network meeting per year to discuss production protocols & company policies.
- 16.3 Producers are asked to participate in the development of marketing materials and consumer outreach events on an as needed basis.
- 16.4 Producers are required to allow Firsthand Foods to photograph their farms, animals and families at least once annually for the development of marketing materials. Producers may approve of all photography used by Firsthand Foods.
- 16.5 Producer affidavits must be updated annually with signatures stating that farmers follow Firsthand Foods' protocols.